



The 6th Asian Academic Society International Conference (AASIC)

*A Transformative Community:
Asia in Dynamism, Innovation, and Globalization*



Gender Role, Working Women and Family: a Sociological Study on some selected professionals in Chittagong City, Bangladesh

Mohammad Mohiuddin¹

Abstract

The article scopes to analyze the role of women in family after getting job. The study that we conducted showed that women's traditional role in the context of family in Bangladesh didn't change. Rather those who are working, have to perform dual job. They maintain both family and work together. In family, they make breakfast, cook lunch and dinner, rear and care children, look after elderly and young members, deal family problems and troubles etc. Simultaneously, in work, they conduct their respective jobs and duties. This type of duality sometimes creates trouble in family and carrier. According to study, as a professional woman, working women (WW) cannot manage their family properly and cannot give quality time to their children. On the other, due to huge pressure from family activities, they cannot concentrate properly to their work, which may affect their carrier. Joint family is an ideal place for working women, where other members can help them and single family is a difficult place for (WW) because they don't get any help from others.

To understand these relationships, some statistical tools have been applied.

Key word: Working women, dualistic job, Household work, Official work, Care-giver, Decision maker, Performativity

Introduction

Woman has a traditional image in Bangladeshi society as a mother, wife, homemaker and caregiver to family members. In this way, the working arena for women has become the home and had little scope to work outside. They also habituated to confine themselves in rearing-caring children, making foods for family members, giving care to older persons and managing household activities etc. After the independence in 1971, especially in 1980s and 1990s, women, however, started working outside with the rise of Bangladesh's export oriented ready-made garments industries (Banks 2013). In the meantime, there was also created enormous scope for women in private and public spheres of different national and international organizations. After 2000, the space for women's working has got a new spirit by the different women friendly policies executed by governments. Most importantly, women policy, maternity leave, free education for girls till higher secondary etc have showed a new way to women's development and empowerment. Consequently, women got scope to create space for them to work and engage themselves as a development partner with male counterparts in family and society. In this process, the participation of women in job market has increased. According to the BBS (2017), the current number of women in Bangladesh is 74.8 million which 49.9% to men is proportionately. Among them, more than 17.2 million women are working in different formal and informal sectors (BBS 2018).

Gradually, women participation in outside working is increasing. The annual growth rate of women's participation in outside work in 2010 was 8.7% when the rate of male counterparts was 1.4% only (BBS 2018). This indicates that the engagement of women in outside work is remarkably increasing and they are contributing to the economic development of the family and the country.

¹ Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh, mohiuddin.socio@cu.ac.bd

N.B: This research work has been funded by University of Chittagong, Bangladesh.



Though the economic participation of women has increased but still the number is not up to the mark. Because of still greater part (81.7%) of the women in the country is solely engaged in household activities. Sometimes women compel to work for the cause of poverty, bearing family expenses, maintaining children's education etc. These women are mostly from lower and lower middle classes families and their level of education is not higher. ILO (2013) showed that most of these women are not literate (50%) and they often work in informal sectors. They mainly work in part time and contractual jobs. Whatever the reason, the access of women in economic development is an important factor and a new path of economic development of the country.

But whenever women started to getting involved in economic activities as well as managing the traditional households, some issues come forward with their dualistic job. Some question whether the working women are playing their role accordingly in family. How they deal their traditional roles such as rearing-caring children, cooking, nursing older members and so on in family. Question also comes about their economic participation in family and access to decisions with male partner. The purpose of the paper is to understand the multiple roles of working women and search all the risen questions about them and find the answers of the questions with an amicable solution.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is liberal feminism, Marxian feminism and Postmodern Feminism. Further, feminists' theories have been reviewed to understand the significance and adaptability of the findings with the current feminist epistemology and its practicality. The review of these theories is as follows

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism is most widely diffused approach within the contemporary women's movement in all over the world (Bird, 1979). It undergirds much popular writings on women's career, equal parenting and the need for gender-free schooling for young children. The description of women's dwindling from full humanness is taken from Jassie Berbard's "The Future of Marriage" (1982). The main propositions of liberal feminism for eliminating inequality are: mobilization to use existing political and legal channels for change; equal economic opportunity; changes in family, school, and mass media messages so that people no longer are socialized into rigid compartmentalized sex roles.

Marxian Feminism

Marxian Feminism began with Marx's theory "social class oppression". Feminists bring together Marxian class analysis and feminist social protest. The major concern of Marx and Engels was social class oppression, but Feminists turned their attention to the gender oppression. This issue is presented in "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" (1884) written and published by Engels from extensive notes made by Marx (Barret, 1985). The major arguments of feminists are the women's subordination results not from her biology but from social arrangements and the relational basis for women's subordination lies in the family, where patriarchy and husband's authority are practiced.

Postmodern Feminism

Feminists try to bring postmodernism women-centered concerns that work to problematize the notion of 'woman'. By addressing the concept of woman as problematic, postmodern feminists accept some key theoretical points of postmodernism and argue that no universal identity or reality undergirds 'woman'. They also argue that there is no specific 'nature' for women. There is single



and unitary human nature in the world and across human society. Further, they also reject or substantially refashion the tale of progress for women and girls utilized by modernist narratives. Feminist thinkers resist the differences between man and women that sustain in misbegotten dreams and perpetuate biased theorizing.

In this purpose, the researcher tried to address the condition of working women in Bangladesh under the idea given by Judith Butler. The major idea of Butler is Performativity.

Butler's Performativity

Butler (1990) treats identity as performative phenomenon heavily regulated with institutionalized regimes that construct some enactment as 'real'-that is, intelligible-versions of a given identity. Moreover, she (1992) treats identity as something normative, regulatory and exclusionary. She traces the processes by which this identity is constructed within language and discourse. To elaborate the mode of this analysis, she covered Foucault's concept 'Genealogy'. Genealogy is a mode of historical investigation that does not have 'the truth' or even knowledge as its goal (Salih 2002). A genealogical investigation into the constitution of the subject will assume that sex and gender are the 'effect' rather than the causes of institutions, discourses and practices; in other words, you as a subject do not create or cause institutions, discourses and practices, but they create or cause you by determining your sex, sexuality and gender. So, according to Butler, gendered and sexed identities are performative. Here Butler is extending de Beauvoir's famous insight that "one is not born, but rather becomes, woman, (1949: 281) to suggest that 'woman' is something we 'do' rather than something we 'are'. So, she argued that sex and gender are discursively constructed.

By the description of this section, the researcher developed a conceptual frame, where major characteristics of working women have been drawn. The frame is given below.

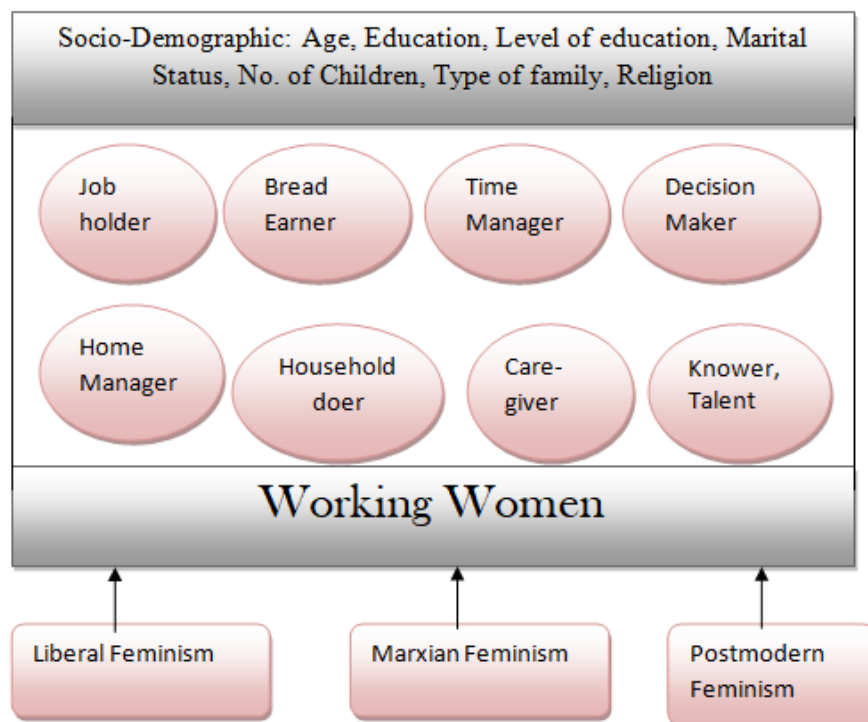


Figure 1: The conceptual framework of the study



Methodology

This study has conducted through the triangular procedures including both qualitative and quantitative methods. It followed the multiple forms of instruments to conduct it purposively. For conducting quantitative study, structured questionnaire have designed and on the other hand, the qualitative tools like interview schedule and interview guidelines have implemented to collect qualitative data. For example, to collect information from primary and secondary school teachers, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) has been employed. At the same time, case study has been utilized when we collected information from Day-laborer women, government bank officials and similarly, Key Informant Interview (KIIs) has been used when data were collected from university teachers.

The sampling procedure for qualitative study was purposively random sampling and sampling technique for qualitative study was the convenient sampling method. On the other hand, the systematic sampling technique was for quantitative study. To conduct the study, a very representative sample size has been drawn for both qualitative and quantitative study. In this purpose, 150 samples have drawn from the population for conducting the quantitative study by using the very popular Fisher's formula. And similarly, 2 FGDs among primary and secondary school teachers, 15 cases among Day-laborers and banker, and 6 KIIs among the university teachers have been conducted for collecting qualitative data.

In this study, the researcher maintained the diverse respondents, target groups and areas to collect information from the working women. The study mainly conducted in the city named Chittagong and the suburban named Haathazari Thana which is also included in the greater Chittagong District. The target groups of the study are:

1. Day-laborers (Brick breakers/sand pullers) in Haathazari and Chittagong city
2. Primary and secondary School Teachers in Haathazari and Chittagong city
3. Chittagong University and East Delta University
4. Government Sonali, Janata, Rupali and Augroni Banks Officers

After formulating the questionnaire, and some other related documents, I have planned for visiting the field. The researcher with some other assistants those who were highly knowledgeable and trained on the issues, have visited the field to collect data. With the formal permission from the respondent the researcher collected the data according to the purpose of the study. After completing the field, the researcher has done the documentation and analysis of the study data. For both qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher has followed the distinguished analytical method those are highly adaptive for qualitative and quantitative study. In this regard, for analyzing the quantitative data, SPSS20 version has been utilized to analyze the quantitative study and on the other hand, to describe the qualitative data, the collected data have been codified, re-codified, categorized and finally it has organized manually as text.

Findings of the study

By analytical interpretation of working women, we can come to understand the real status of working women in family and society. In this section, different mathematical tools, charts and tables were applied to visualize the working women's condition in society. First needs to analyze socio-demographic profile of women.



Socio-Demographic Profile

The socio-demographic status of the respondents is not same in the study area, since from multiple professionals such as doctor, teacher, banker, day laborer etc were selected as the study population. In social and demographic profile, we include age, education, marital status, number of children, marriage duration and so on. As indicated in the figure 2, more than 72% of the working women were belonged to the age 40 and below those who were actively working in different sector of Bangladesh. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BSS 2018) shows that the current active work force aged 15 and older is 58.2% in the country whereas 36.3% is female. It means that greater proportion of women in working sector is comparatively young which can be a sharp indicator of economic development of the country. Not only is that but also 80% of that work force in the study area was educated while only a very small portion (3.33%) was self-educated and illiterate. The level of education of the respondents was also higher. The data showed that 54% of women completed master's degree and only 4% women were primary educated (Figure 3).

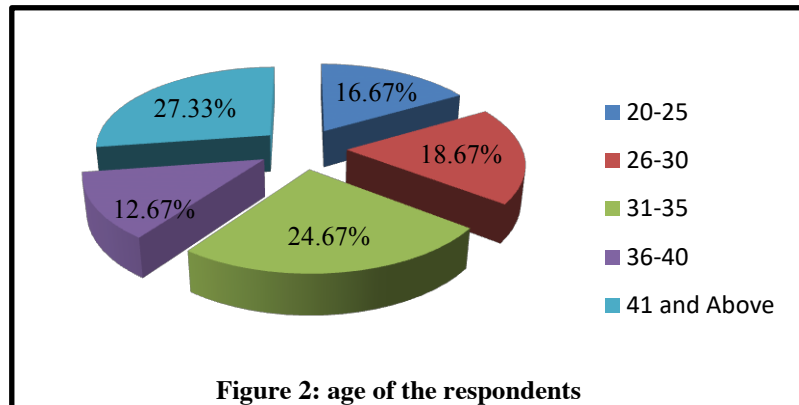


Figure 2: age of the respondents

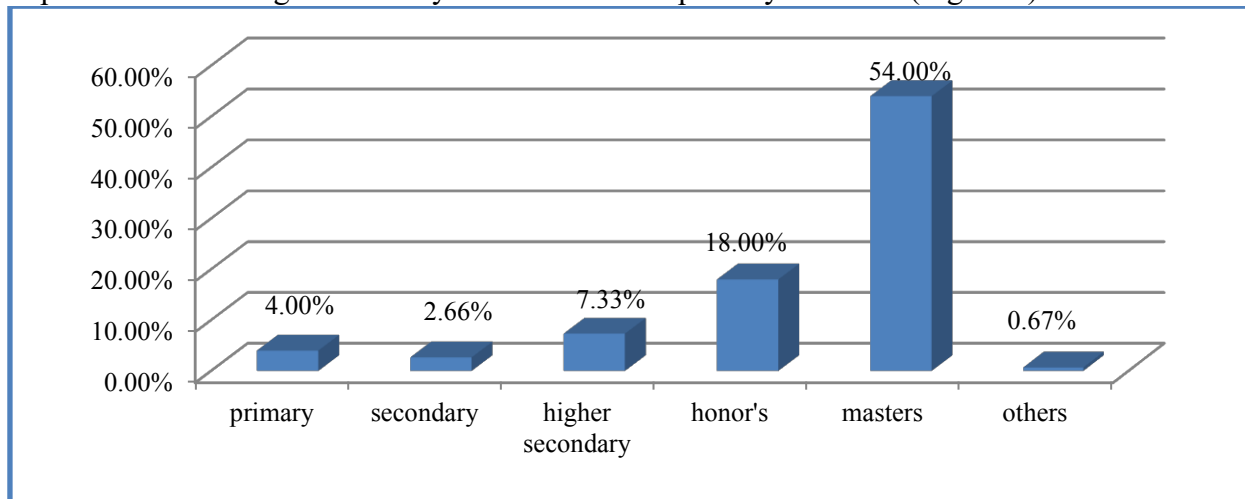


Figure 3: Level of Education

As the marital status, 75% women were married while 20% women were single whereas more than half of women (59.6%) lived in single family and 44.7% women lived in joint family. The study found a relationship between education and number of children. The educated women (60.3%) had a small number of family size (children 1-2), while lower educated women (26.7%) had greater family size (5 and above). However, the mean of the children in study was 2.3 which were larger than national growth rate (1.37) and national fertility rate (2.1) (BSS 2018). It has been mainly due to day-laborers those who were 16% among the total samples of the study.

Economic Activities of Women

This section discusses about economic activities of working women based on the objective of the study. In the study, majority of the professionals were selected from white color jobs such as doctor, teacher, banker, nurse etc and only labor was taken from non-white. 77% of the respondents



were from high rated job holders where around 50% was teacher and only 16% women were from day-laborers (Figure 4).

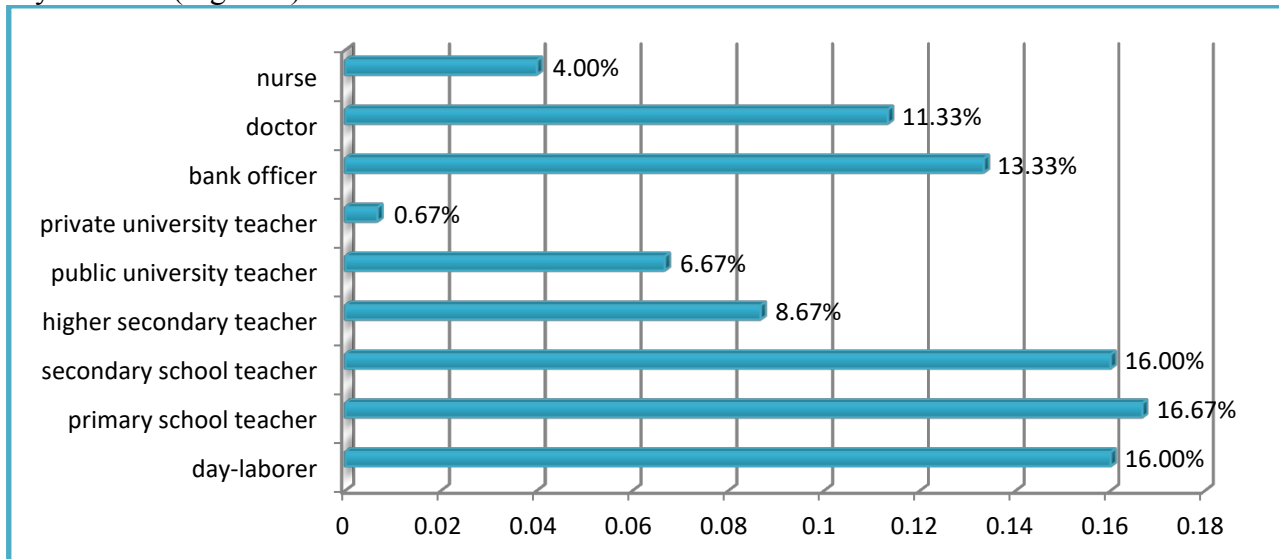


Figure 4: Occupation of the women

Since multiple professionals were selected for the study, so it showed much deviated monthly income from one to another. The lowest range of income was found from 5000 to 10,000 BDT or around 90US dollar that was the largest in numbers (34.67%) and 8.67% women's monthly income was around 50,000 BDT or \$588US. Simultaneously, around 55% working women earn more than 15000 taka monthly which one is a good indicator for their economic development and freedom. The average income of women was 23,330 BDT or \$275 per month and their standard deviation is 16,910.57BDT or \$199.

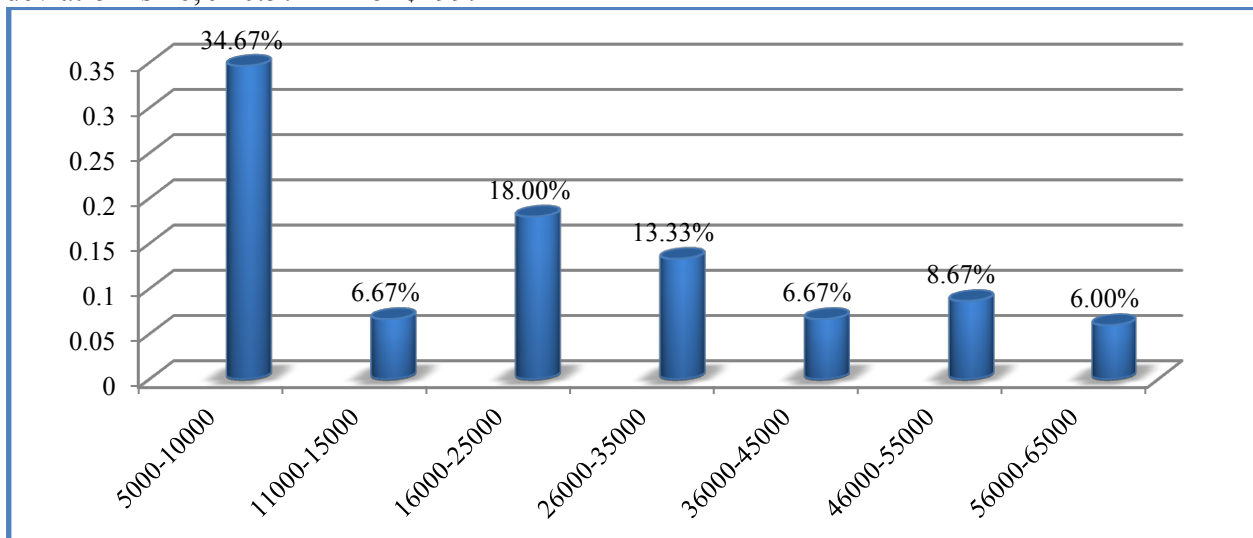


Figure 5: Monthly Income

One important finding of the study was the working women's contribution in family income. By using multiple responses, we found that 80% of the respondents share their income in family and 39.3% of women used their income only for their personal expenses. This shows a clear indication that women's economic contribution helped the family, the self and the family members. Another significant finding was the husband (56.67%) and family members (68%) positive attitude towards women's job which once thought impossible in Bangladesh.



Access to Decisions by WW

The study wanted to measure the women's access to decision in family with their economic contribution. To understand the access to decisions needs to understand women's access to family matters such as daily family affairs, spending money, visiting relatives, taking babies, going out of home and so on. These are fundamental factors in Bangladesh to understand the freedom of women and access to decisions in family and society. Though barrier to women's freedom has changed a lot, still many women cannot enjoy their free movement in society due to prohibition from family and society. Our study showed that half of the women had free access to decisions in every matter in family and society and 53.3% women had access to decision in family matters with their husband. Generally those who stay in single family had greater access to decisions with husband while 19.3% took decisions in family alone. Working women (50%) also had access to decisions in buying different family materials with husbands and more than 50% women had economic freedom to spend as they like (Table 1).

Table 1: Access to decisions by Women

Decision in daily affairs	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Self	29	19.3
Husband	16	10.7
Both husband and wife	80	53.3
Parents	32	21.3
Parents in law	5	3.3
Elder brother	2	1.3
Decision in spending money		
Self	42	28.0
Husband	14	9.3
Both husband and wife	82	54.7
Parents	23	15.3
Elder brother	2	1.3
Decisions in taking baby		
Self	7	4.7
Husband	8	5.3
Both husband and wife	92	61.3
Parents	9	6.0
Decisions to visiting relatives		
Self	37	24.7
Husband	14	9.3
Both husband and wife	76	50.7
Parents	28	18.7
Parents in law	2	1.3
Elder brother	1	.7
Elder brother in law	1	.7

Once upon a time, in Bangladesh, taking baby was a decision from senior members specially parents and grants parents of husband. Situation has changed and now it is the matter of husband and wife. Other members of the family have little to influence in taking babies. This happens due to changing family structure in Bangladesh. Before 2000, family in Bangladesh was joined in nature where senior members took decisions and juniors followed it. People then basically lived in village and males who worked in cities kept their wives with their parents and grant parents. Women's



working then seemed very disrespectful for family status though poor women worked for collecting their livelihood. This was a complex family structure and decisions always rested to senior members. But after 2000, there is boom in women's working due to garment sectors and multinational corporations. Now women's working is seemed as helping hand for family income and this opens the door for women to access in decisions. Working women are now living with their husband or single in city and this helps to transfer the family structure from extended to nuclear system. In this structure, decisions are mainly taken by husband and wife since seniors do not live with them. So, decision such as taking baby is now the decision of husband and wife (61.3%). In the same way, visiting relatives and going to vacations are also a mutual decision of both husband and wife.

Women's Family Responsibility

One of the important objectives of the study was to know the responsibility and participation of women in family affairs. Whether the traditional role of women has been changed for working women or it is still same. The study has provided significant findings in this regard. As showed though they were working women and passed quality time outside the home, but they involved in different family activities whenever they get chance. Not only that, before going out for office, many women (60.66%) prepared breakfast, and lunch (58.66%) for family members and even prepared dinner (64.67%) after coming back from office. In this engagement, we wanted to know about their leisure time. They said generally after office; many women (42%) worked in family and rest of the time they (79.33%) passed with their family members. Literally working women had no leisure in day time and time for themselves. Because of they had to manage both home and family together.

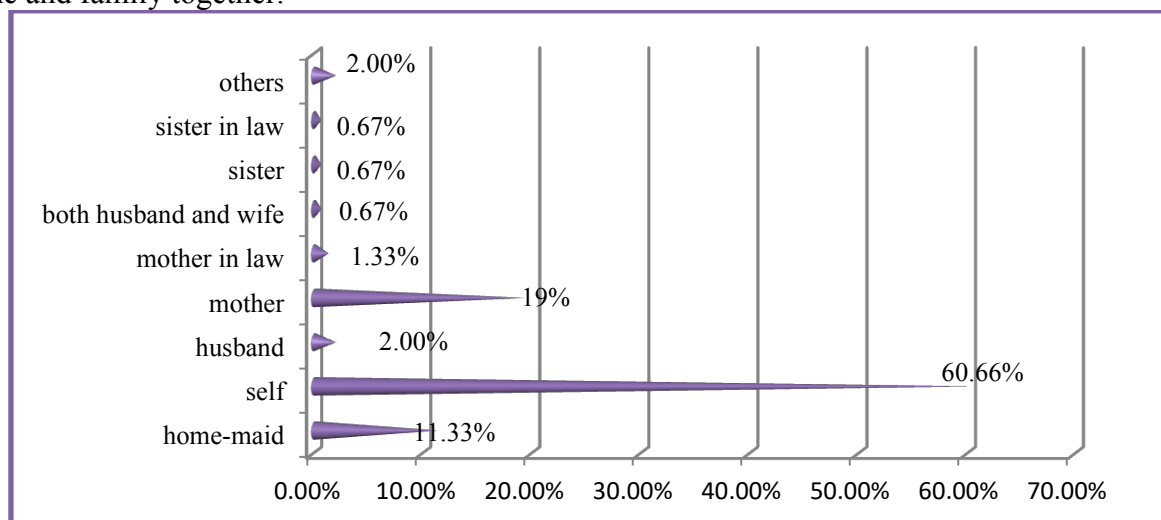


Figure 6: Women work in family

Care-giver to baby and Children

Care-giving to babies and children was a very significant part of the study to understand the changing role of working women whether they can give proper time to their children and other members. In this study, 38% women were new born baby's mother and they (12%) looked after the babies though home-maid paid (11%) significant role in rearing-caring babies. Similarly working women (23%) invested more time to babies than any other member in the family.



Table 2: Care to baby child by WW (Multiple Responses)

Care to baby during day time	Frequency	Percentage (%)
home-maid	17	11.3
Self	18	12.0
Husband	4	2.7
Mother	13	8.7
mother in law	8	5.3
both husband and wife	3	2.0
Sister	2	1.3
sister in law	2	1.3
Who passes more time with baby		
home-maid	9	6.0
Self	35	23.3
Husband	5	3.3
Mother	7	4.7
mother in law	6	4.0
both husband and wife	11	7.3
Sister	1	0.7
sister in law	1	0.7

Furthermore, working women (22.7%) equally looked after their other children and invested quality with them and beside home-maid did alternative role in caring of the children. These women (32.7%) also prepared their children for school. Beyond their babies and children, working women had to take care to senior members. Majority of them (66%) looked after the senior members in the family and seniors (53.33%) also became satisfied by the care and hospitality of WW. But WW opined that they could not give quality time to their children after maintaining office what a child need. Reality is that they were spending half time of a day in office. This may impact to children's health and mentality. They were not happy with the time they were giving to their children.

Conclusion

The working women have to play dual role in family and office. As a professional woman, they are conducting office and also managing household affairs. Many professional women prepare breakfast, cook lunch and dinner and rear and care children. It becomes harder for professional women, when it come with babies. They similarly invest quality time to seniors and other family members. Their traditional role of managing house didn't change rather adds office herewith. They are simultaneously doing everything like a non-professional woman. Study mentioned that middle class joint family is an ideal place for working women where they might get help from other family members. Those who were from single family; they have to face unbound troubles and difficulties in managing both family and office. This dualism sometimes becomes harder for working women to perform better in office and smooth their carrier. Yet working women ready to face challenge and want to create a position in the society which helps her to be an equal part with male in all sphere of life either family or society.

As recommendation, it may be said that family members should contribute more in creating a better carrier for working women. It's natural that the income of working women goes to her house and helps in family expenses.

On other hand, colleagues should be helping mentality in dealing their female colleagues. Our country approaches with women but yet it has to go far way. Half of the population of the country is



The 6th Asian Academic Society International Conference (AASIC)
A Transformative Community:
Asia in Dynamism, Innovation, and Globalization



women, thus real development of the country will not be possible by leaving this half part. Working women can be great workforce who can contribute in national economy and contribute to the development of the nation.

Overall a positive mentality should be built in the minds of the common people. Women should be considered as a normal human being not just as a woman. Our operative mentality can help her feeling comfort in inside and outside of the family.

Similarly, government and development partners should take many more initiatives for the betterment of working women and their safety. Through these ways, working women can have a position in the society and be an equal part in the development of the country with men.

Reference

1. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2018, *Bangladesh Statistics 2017*, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, Bangladesh, last visited Oct. 2018, <<http://www.bbs.gov.bd/Census>>.
2. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2018, *Report on Labour Force Survey 2016-17*, Ministry of Planning, Dhaka, Bangladesh, last visited Oct. 2018, <<http://www.bbs.gov.bd/Census>>.
3. Babbie, Earl (2004), "The logic of sampling", *The Practice of Social Research* Thomson Asia Pte. Ltd, Singapore p.178-185
4. Barnerd, Jessie 1982, *Future of the marriage*, Yale University Press, USA.
5. Engels, Friedrich 1884, *The origin of the family, private property and the state*, Hottingen, Zurich, Translation published in 1909, Chicago, C.H. Kerr and Company.
6. International Labor Organization 2013, *Female labor force participation on Bangladesh: trends, drivers and barriers*, ILO Asia Pacific women working series, South Asian country office, India.
7. Neuman, Lawrence (1997), "Research using Quantitative Data", *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approach*, University of Chicago Press, p.123-128
8. Salih, Sara 2002, *Judith Butler*, Routledge, London and New York.